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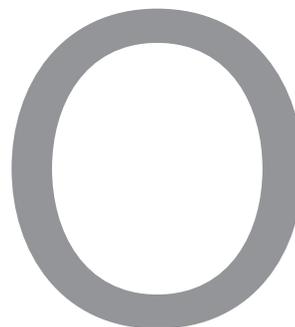
Outdoor apparel brands find Ready To

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Gordon Seabury, CEO, Horny Toad



Outdoor industry veterans with a bit of gray in their hair will remember the business world's begrudging acceptance of "casual Friday" attire. Wardrobe choices that seem natural today were once viewed as wildly out of place in 9-5 offices.

"We've seen this opportunity for quite some time. Since day one the idea was to take technically driven fabrics being applied to crossover lifestyle design," reports Gordon Seabury, CEO at Horny Toad. "The outdoor lifestyle apparel category didn't exist when we got into the business. Its great to see it come as far as it has. The category is now legitimate."

In many industries the corporate uniform of suit, tailored shirt and tie have given way to plaids, khakis and lightweight fleeces. "Now there are no rules. You can create your own looks and it's acceptable. It opens the door for the product we create that's inspired outdoors to be one of those pieces," reports Sue Parham, VP-global apparel merchandising at Columbia Sportswear. "It used to be that you would not integrate your lifestyle wardrobe with your work wardrobe. Those rules have gone out the window and people are mixing everything together."

More than ever, outdoor enthusiasts are purchasing apparel from the technical equipment and apparel brands they use during weekend pursuits. "People are buying more versatile apparel and that apparel aligns with what they are passionate about. They are integrating those pieces into their wardrobes," says Parham.

Consumers appear to evaluate apparel the same way they make decisions about their outdoor gear. "We're known for our footwear and our apparel is an extension of the brand. What we hear back consistently from consumers is that the brand is all about versatility," says Bill Inman, Merrell's apparel business director. "I can wear it to work and then go for a hike. Versatility is definitely what people are looking for. It's a hiking short with enough style to cross over from outdoor activity to lifestyle use."

In addition to specific technical-oriented feature sets, outdoor apparel has also been inspired by an environmentally friendly ethos. "The outdoor natural influence in fashion is seen as an unpretentious, honest, reflection of changing values as a new generation realizes the enormous value that nature/outdoors plays in their lives and those of their children," notes Marty Weening, president of Gramicci.

Balancing Fashion and Technical Performance

Consumers, already familiar with an outdoor brand's performance with technical apparel and equipment now measure them on their fashion sense. "When they have a good experience with the product on the weekend the barriers for the outdoor brands to move into lifestyle are reduced. Outdoor brands have the ability to provide product without sacrificing performance,

"For women, the cute factor is what they respond to. They are shopping at outdoor retail because they assume there is a technical performance aspect to it already."

Bill Inman, Apparel Business Director, Merrell

opportunity to expand lifestyle apparel sales

Wear 7 Days a Week

their brand or their heritage with apparel that has the flexibility to be worn the other five days of the week,” says Greg Houser, VP-production at Marmot. “We have the ability to be more fashionable without sacrificing who we are as a brand. It’s a fine balance between outdoor lifestyle and technical performance. That’s what we’re trying to get at and that’s the opportunity for retailers and outdoor brands.”

Helena Barbour, product line director for lifestyle at Patagonia, comments: “Customers have become much more discriminating with their purchasing decisions with company’s like ours. It’s making sure our product we offer in addition to being fashionable and performance oriented are also relevant to market trends.”

What apparel features are outdoor enthusiasts looking for today? “Crossover versatility, and design that enhances the outdoor active experience but also can be worn any-wear concept. Comfort, comfort, comfort and fit combined with function. Finally, performance fabrics that really do perform wick, breath, dry fast, don’t shrink and last,” notes Weening.

not to overthink and overdesign our apparel. We believe in staples, classics and clean lines. Being a mountain lifestyle brand we recognize the need to understand customer,” says Noah Robertson, Mountain Khakis, director of design and product development. “When we use more technical fabrics we are addressing those activities. Having those details resonates with the consumer.”

As expected, men and women have different apparel purchase behaviors. “For women, the cute factor is what they respond to. They are shopping at outdoor retail because they assume there is a technical performance aspect to it already,” says Inman. “Younger men want cleaner apparel designs with the technical functionality they expect in outdoor gear. They look for features like wrinkle free and hidden pockets but with a style that works in a casual work environment.”

Columbia’s Spring ’12 apparel line will launch significant technical innovations designed to improve the user’s outdoor experience. Function and fashion play equally important roles. “The functional performance of the garment is what changes their minds. You may



Left to Right: Mountain Khakis Women’s Oxbow Burnt Sienna shirt, Mountain Khakis Men’s Oxbow Dark Olive shirt. Mountain Khakis Fairway Polo shirt

Patagonia’s Spring ’12 apparel line focuses on apparel products that have had a performance history. “We’ve retained that appeal and updated the styling to be a little more street savvy. The crossover from the mountain, the crag, or the beach to the day job, the street and a BBQ with friends is an easy one,” says Kristo Torgersen, product line coordinator for lifestyle, Patagonia.

Fortunately, outdoor apparel brands aren’t as tied to rapidly changing fashion trends as other lifestyle brands are. “Outdoor apparel is not intended or designed to be the trend of the week,” says Seabury. “It’s intended to have longevity. Fabrics will last more than a decade and styles will last five to seven years. The designs that we are putting them into are designed for longevity. We never want you to wake up one day and look at a Horny Toad product and be embarrassed about it being out of style.”

Mountain Khakis apparel reflects a classic, enduring design. “We try

love how something looks but you fall in love with it when it performs,” reports Parham. At Columbia, Every opportunity we have to bring better performance to our apparel is one of those features that converts people and gives them a better opinion of our brand.”

Today, outdoor apparel brands have seized on the opportunity to position their products with mainstream lifestyle brands like the Gap, Old Navy, L.L.Bean, J.Crew and others.

Outdoor enthusiasts are becoming more comfortable with visiting specialty retailers for apparel needs. “We’re seeing the outdoor retailer turning into more of a one-stop shop for people. Instead of just weekend wear they are going there for seven-day a week apparel,” says Houser. “That’s the opportunity the outdoor industry has. The customers enjoy the shopping environment, the customer service and the quality of the product is much better than they are going to get in other shopping channels. Instead of buying disposable wear they are buying products



Left to Right: Marmot Ellwood shirt, Mountain Khakis collection, Patagonia All Stone shirt, Mountain Khakis, Americano Jacket.

they can trust. That's really important in this economy."

With easing apparel standards in the workplace, clothing choices that work during and after work are being widely accepted. "There's an opportunity for consumers to fully embrace this idea of one wardrobe," says Seabury. "The ability to get up in the morning and put on clothing with fabrications thoughtfully developed with performance, functional and sustainable aspects but still in terms of comfort, look and feel not compromise any of the things you would be looking for in a sportswear collection."

Specialty retailers have to adapt accordingly and learn to improve merchandising presentations to at least reflect what consumers are used to in other apparel stores. "There is an evolution going on. The way we are presenting apparel is becoming more cohesive. There's a lot more focus on collections rather than just classifications. But there are still lingering channels out there where you can walk in and see a sea of convertible pants in various colors of tan," explains Parham. "By using color and integrating lifestyle pieces, we are advancing the merchandising presentation."

Apparel brands work with retailers to change the way they present apparel. "Retailers are starting to focus on brands rather than categories. Some stores would merchandise all pants together," states Robertson. "Now I see more retailers merchandising brands separately. That's much more in relation to what department stores will do. This is much more than just a pants and shorts business."

Robertson notes that since retailers have invested thousands of dollars in merchandising fixtures, it can be a challenge getting them to accept those elements from apparel brands. "The best retailers have upgraded their visual merchandising and store presentations to match the [fashion] industry outside our category," reports Inman. "We're working with them to make that easier for them to do."

Selling apparel requires learning new inventory management thinking.

"Outdoor specialty retail is built on an equipment model and two turn business cycle. Buy in the spring, hope it all sells, close it out, then order a delivery of new product for the fall and winter," explains Seabury. "We're working real hard to with outdoor specialty retailers to learn the tools of what it is to be a sophisticated merchandiser."

Horny Toad opened its own store, the Lizard Lounge, to experiment with merchandising and display ideas. "Whatever advice we give to retailers is tested and proven versus experimented on with their stores," says Seabury. "When you are dealing with lifestyle apparel you have to make it interesting, fresh and much more relevant month to month and week to week. So merchandising, inventory management and planning are much more centric skills than some of our traditional outdoor retailers may have had in their foundational toolbox. We're super committed to partner with our retailers and to work together to figure out how to make them better and how we can be better as a supplier. Everyone has embraced the opportunity and trying to figure out how to get better and evolve up the chain."

In the future, lifestyle apparel from outdoor brands may play an even larger role in consumer's wardrobes. Expanding collections, improving merchandising and staying true to technical performance benefits, outdoor brands and specialty retailers can capture significant revenues.

This is just not an opportunity for the retailers but also for the outdoor brands to expand their product offerings. Retailers have to be more diverse in their offerings. They have to provide more choice in their assortment. That will attract people to the store and give them a reason not to walk out empty-handed. With a \$400 technical jacket, you are giving the customer one or two choices. Adding lifestyle apparel allows your current customer to buy more from you and you now find a new customer without losing them to another store where they aren't happy with the service or product selection. ●



Left to Right: Mountain Khakis Women's Collection, Marmot Women's Kristie, Marmot Pinnacle, Marmot Stride